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	AEX-00	AS-00	A-00	ACQ-00	CA-00	CIAE-00	COME-00
	CCOE-00	DODE-00	ANHR-00	WHA-00	SRPP-00	DS-00	MEDE-00
	EAP-00	EB-00	EUR-00	OIGO-00	FBIE-00	UTED-00	CSEP-00
	VC-00	FRB-00	FSI-00	OBO-00	H-00	TEDE-00	INR-00
	IO-00	JUSE-00	LAB-01	LOC-01	VCE-00	MMP-00	MOFM-00
	AC-00	NEA-00	DCP-01	NSAE-00	OIC-02	OIG-00	TFBI-00
	PER-00	PM-00	ACE-00	P-00	IRM-00	SSO-00	SS-00
	TEST-00	SA-00	ASDS-00	FMP-00	R-00	SDBU-00	PMB-00
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SUBJECT: SYRIA: 2003 ANNUAL TERRORISM REPORT

REF: STATE 301352

1. Following is Embassy's submission for the 2003 Annual
Terrorism Report. Responses are keyed to Reftel.

(A) SYRIAN ACTIONS TO SUPPORT COALITION AGAINST
TERRORISM/AL-QAIDA

LAW ENFORCEMENT: The Syrian government has repeatedly and publicly condemned terrorism, but continues to distinguish between terrorism and what it considers to be "legitimate" armed resistance to occupation (see (E) below). Syria continued limited cooperation with the US on matters related to al-Qaida and other terrorist organizations and individuals in 2003. The SARG also cooperates with other foreign governments on counterterrorism (mostly limited to information exchanges) and related issues such as illegal migration and money laundering (see (E) below).

TERRORIST ASSETS: The SARG has told us it has looked for, but failed to find, any assets of terrorist entities in the Syrian financial system (see (J) below).

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CT LAWS: To our knowledge, no new terrorism legislation was enacted by the SARG in 2003.

CT TREATIES: Syria is party to four of the 12 international counterterrorism conventions. The SARG took no action in 2003 on ratifying the remaining eight.

(B) RESPONSE OF JUDICIAL SYSTEM TO ACTS OF INTERNATIONAL OR DOMESTIC TERRORISM

In 2003, the SARG prosecuted suspected al-Qa'ida operative Maher Arar for "maintaining ties to terrorist groups," but the presiding judge found insufficient evidence to proceed with a trial and dismissed the case. Arar, a Syrian-Canadian dual national, had been imprisoned in Syria since being deported from the US in October 2002. He has returned to Canada.

In specific instances in 2003 when the Embassy provided information on possible terrorist threats against American citizens or facilities, Syrian government officials responded appropriately.

(C) SYRIAN EXTRADITIONS

Embassy is unaware of any Syrian extradition requests in 2003. The international press has reported that Syria in 2002 requested the extradition from Morocco of suspected al-Qa'ida operative Mohammed Zammar, who is a dual German-Syrian national. There is no extradition treaty between the US and Syria. Syrian officials give high priority to investigating reports of possible terrorist threats against US personnel and facilities in Syria and neighboring countries.

(D) SIGNIFICANT IMPEDIMENTS TO PROSECUTION/EXTRADITION OF SUSPECTED TERRORISTS

Post is unaware of any significant legal impediments to Syrian government prosecution of terrorism. As a matter of policy, however, Syria would be unlikely to prosecute or extradite suspected terrorists from Palestinian or other groups which receive safehaven or other forms of support from the Syrian government.

(E) SYRIAN RESPONSES OTHER THAN PROSECUTION

Since September 11, the Syrian government has repeatedly and publicly condemned terrorism, including and especially that emanating from al-Qa'ida. In 2003, for example,

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President Asad denounced the "horrible massacre" of the August 30 Najaf bombing, which killed "large numbers of innocent Iraqi people," and, reiterating Syria's condemnation of terrorism, expressed Syria's "care to see stability and security prevail" in Iraq. The SARG also condemned, inter alia, the bombing of the Marriott Hotel in Jakarta in August, the al-Qa'ida attacks against residential compounds in Saudi Arabia in May and November; and the synagogue bombings in Istanbul in November.

Mindful of its own fight against Islamic extremist terrorism in the early 1980's, Syria has continued to discourage any signs of public support for al-Qa'ida, including in the media and at mosques.

However, Syrian officials continue to distinguish between terrorism and what it considers to be "legitimate" armed resistance undertaken by people living in occupied

territories for the sake of national liberation. For this reason, Syria does not recognize Hizballah or the Palestinian rejectionist groups as terrorist organizations, and thus refuses to take actions against them consonant with the actions it has taken against other terrorist organizations/individuals. Syria has also not publicly condemned suicide bombings aimed at Israeli civilians, which it sometimes refers to as "martyr attacks."

Syria has modest bilateral agreements with a number of foreign governments on counterterrorism, mostly limited to information exchanges. For example, Italy in 2002 established a cooperative agreement allowing for information exchanges on illegal migration and money laundering, and is working with the SARG to expand cooperation to include an operational dimension. Russia and Syria are engaged in "ad hoc" CT cooperation, which Russia hopes to formalize in a cooperative agreement on fighting organized crime and international terrorism. Germany also cooperates informally on counterterrorism matters with Syrian authorities. Syria also has anti-terrorism agreements with Turkey and the Arab League states.

(F) COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS UNDERTAKEN IN 2003

In 2003, the Syrian government continued to respond appropriately when presented with specific information indicating possible imminent terrorist acts directed against US interests and personnel in Syria and abroad. Syria has been responsive when the Embassy has raised US

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security concerns. In the lead-up to Operation Iraqi Freedom and up to the present time, Foreign Minister Shara assured the Ambassador and the Charge d'Affaires separately that the SARG was committed to protecting Embassy personnel and facilities and to safeguarding American citizens in Syria; during the war, Syrian authorities took effective action to ensure security.

Acting in their own interest as well in response to US concerns about foreign fighters infiltrating into Iraq via Syria, the SARG has taken measures to improve security along its border with Iraq. SARG officials claim that they are doing their best, but that the 600-km border is long, porous and difficult to control. The Syrian military has been fully cooperative with DAO requests to inspect the border.

(G) SYRIAN SUPPORT FOR INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

Syria continues to provide safehaven, political support and limited material assistance to a number of Palestinian groups, including allowing them to maintain headquarters or offices in Damascus. Some of these groups direct and support terrorist attacks in Israel and the Occupied Territories. In May, responding to US concerns, the SARG announced that these rejectionist groups had "voluntarily" closed their Damascus offices. Although they have sharply reduced their public profiles and ceased their media activities, some of these offices continue to engage in facilitative activities, such as providing advice and financing for terrorist operations in Israel and the Occupied Territories. Before their "closure," the Syrian government disingenuously insisted that the offices undertook only political and informational activities; this continues to be the official SARG line. The most notable Palestinian rejectionist groups in Syria are the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command (PFLP-GC), Palestine Islamic Jihad (PIJ), and the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS). The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) is also headquartered in Damascus, along with a handful of largely defunct splinter groups which opposed the Oslo Peace Accords. The DFLP and other smaller groups are not designated foreign terrorist groups.

In 2003, Syria also continued to permit the occasional Iranian resupply, via Syrian territory, of Hizballah in Lebanon.

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Syria has taken a lead role in Arab and Islamic fora to formulate a unified Arab/Muslim position that Palestinian and Lebanese groups fighting Israeli occupation are not terrorists, and has used its seat in the UN Security Council (which it relinquishes at the end of the year) as a platform to encourage international support for Palestinian national aspirations and denounce Israeli actions in the Palestinian territories as "state terrorism."

(H) SYRIAN PUBLIC STATEMENTS

As noted in (E) above, Syria's official media during 2003

repeatedly condemned international terrorism, particularly al-Qa'ida. However, the Syrian press continued to legitimize Palestinian rejectionist and Hizballah terrorism as acceptable armed resistance undertaken by people living in occupied territories for the sake of national liberation. Syria also considers the excessive use of force by "Israeli occupation forces," particularly when it occurs in civilian areas, as "state terrorism" to which armed opposition is a valid response. The Syrian press also sometimes refers to Palestinian suicide attacks against Israelis as "martyr attacks."

Syrian officials praise and the Syrian media regularly showcases Iranian support for the Palestinian Intifada and the Lebanese resistance. Syrian public statements regarding North Korea are less frequent but also supportive, reaffirming bilateral ties and cooperation.

(I) SIGNIFICANT CHANGES SINCE 2002

No change: Syria regularly condemns terrorism, but still distinguishes between terrorism and "legitimate" armed resistance to occupation. The SARG insists that the Damascus offices of the Palestinian rejectionist groups it hosts are closed.

(J) US COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS AND INITIATIVES WITH SYRIA

Senior US officials have raised counterterrorism issues with Syrian officials on various occasions, including during Secretary Powell's visit to Damascus in May. Following the September 11 attacks, the SARG provided tangible and beneficial CT cooperation, in particular with respect to information-sharing. However, the SARG has refused to cooperate in CT efforts against Palestinian and Lebanese groups which it considers to be engaged in legitimate resistance of illegal occupation.

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The SARG has complied with US requests that it look for, and block, terrorist assets in the Syrian financial system, but reported back that no such assets were found. The SARG maintains that al-Qa'ida-affiliated organizations and individuals do not and cannot have assets in Syria. Syria has not taken action to freeze the assets of Hizballah or Palestinian rejectionist groups because it does not consider these to be terrorist organizations (see (G) above). Given that Syria does not yet have a functioning private banking system, it is not likely that any group would keep its assets there.

(K) US-SYRIAN COOPERATION:

(i) IN INVESTIGATING/PROSECUTING ACTS OF TERRORISM AGAINST US CITIZENS OR INTERESTS

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and the al-Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia in 1996, the United States government asked Syria to cooperate with international efforts to identify and bring to justice those responsible. The SARG agreed, and has cooperated (primarily in terms of information sharing) with the US and others in both investigations.

(ii) IN PREVENTING ACTS OF TERRORISM IN SYRIA

The Syrian government seeks to maintain strict security within its territory. This extends to the prevention of terrorist acts against citizens of the United States. In 2003, the SARG responded appropriately when notified of specific instances of terrorist threats against US facilities and personnel. There were instances, however, when Syrian authorities did not share threat information with the Embassy until the threats were resolved.

(L) US-SYRIAN COOPERATION IN PREVENTING ACTS OF TERRORISM AGAINST US CITIZENS OR INTERESTS IN SYRIA

In recent years, the United States has sought the cooperation of the Syrian government in preventing possible terrorist attacks against American citizens or interests, in Syria and elsewhere. The Syrian government has assured us repeatedly that, as a matter of policy, it will take every possible measure to protect US citizens and facilities from terrorist activity in Syria. In times of increased threat levels, the SARG has increased police protection around the Embassy and American residences; despite increased tension in the bilateral relationship,

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Syrian authorities provided effective security to Embassy personnel and facilities during Operation Iraqi Freedom. During the past five years, there have been no acts of terrorism against American targets within Syrian territory.
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